

# UNBEKNOWINGLY SEARCHING

by

The Blogger Formerly Known As

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They met before birth itself.

In life they unknowingly searched for one another,  
pulling together the best they could, given the circumstances.

Like magnets with obstacles between them.

The attraction was obviously deeper than the physical,  
so what was it that drew them so powerfully together?

## CHAPTER ONE

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep. And to summarize, He created light, sky, land, sea, vegetation, day, night and then creatures, respectively.

Almost as an afterthought, it was on to people; He set up a factory in which to make their souls, ready to be slotted into their bones, flesh and other gooey bits, which were being produced on earth.

To this day a sign still hangs over the main doorway: **‘God & Son. Est. since before the beginning of time’**.

The heavenly soul factory was churning them out to satisfy the earth's insatiable demands. "If the Boss hadn't told'em to go forth and multiply," complained one of the workers, "we could have had a coffee break by now." He raised his eyes to wherever it is those in heaven raise their eyes, and carried on, grudgingly.

“Oooh, get old sour-grapes over there,” cooed a member of the labelling department, peeling off a label, and sticking it to a soul, “grumpy as ever. Should have been pensioned off eras ago, really he should”

The label read, ‘Soul no.: **19,789B/1103L/YO65**. Intended for body type: **Human (not interchangeable). 1 Billion heartbeats maximum.**’ Then they were tagged ‘Celestial Standards Approved, “A” Grade. Made in Heaven,’ after which there was a

quick inspection, and the 'best before' and 'expiry' dates were added.

This was the place where it all started. Everybody who was anybody, and even those who weren't, once waited their turn here. One or two unnoticed smiles appeared on the second cloud further along, a constant line of souls, just floating, and that was about it. Except for the occasional stork and plenty of mist.

That said, lately there had been a few satellites hovering around, but they were largely unobserved for some reason.

The workers wouldn't have been all that excited by the satellites anyway, or any of mankind's inventions for that matter: mankind was always impressing itself though - Boats were easy; bobbing up and down on the water was of no problem. The wheel took a little longer, and flight a lot longer. But, as if to labour a point, mankind tried to do it all higher and faster. The speed of sound had already been conquered, and mankind thought itself masterly. They thought the same though when they managed to travel at the *speed of smell*, all those years ago, (well, when the wind was in the right direction). And the speed of light was next on their agenda.

The heavenly workers were unimpressed; they were more than capable of exceeding those speeds without the aid of machinery. Not that you'd notice as they begrudgingly went about their business.

In the distance, if you squinted hard enough, a faint trickle of upward movement could just be seen through the wispieness. But from here you couldn't quite make it out. A flow of souls returning after their time on earth, streaming back to the heavenly realms, carefully avoiding the flight paths of angels.

Completely out of sight, right around the back of heaven, there's a large door beneath a sign which is marked, rather unclearly, with the words, '**Goods In**'. No one has ever bothered to change the sign, but it *should* have actually read, '**Good? Sin?**' The reason being, this is the place where the 'used souls' have an assessment on how they used their precious gift of life.

It's the place where everyone stands before the ever knowing God. He smiles patiently as they flounder around, trying desperately hard to find excuses for all the rotten things they've said and done, and why they hadn't kept in touch all this time.

Sidney was a stork, bad tempered and tired from an eternity of flying backwards and forwards between heaven and earth. With a particularly heavy infant in his beak, his mood could not have been worse. Descending wearily, he muttered bitterly, "Maybe you should make it a goal to lose a bit of weight. Course it's not *you* who has to worry, is it? Oh no! It's muggins here who has to carry you . . ." He became so distracted with his rantings that he hadn't noticed the soul slipping gradually from his beak.

"Shit!" he said as he helplessly watched his delivery falling straight into the *wrong* red, screaming baby. Sidney wasn't used to being startled, having seen it all before. Or, so he thought.

He wasted no time in heading back from whence he came, still complaining, “I don’t know why I bother, I *really* don’t. They’ll be an awful lot of paperwork to do for this one . . .”

And there was.

Meanwhile back at fluffy Cloud Seven, the conveyer belt from the factory had just delivered soul 19,789B/1103L/YO65 to the ‘souls to be departed’ line. No sooner had the new soul composed itself than it was knocked over by soul 19,790B/1103L/YO65 falling sharply from the factory’s archaic exiting system. This seemingly small incident caused a surprisingly long-reaching problem; the chip on soul 19,790B/1103L/YO65’s shoulder would remain for a very long time to come.

“What the heck do you think you’re doing?!” demanded soul 19,790B/1103L/YO65 testily.

“What the heck do *I* think *I’m* doing?” soul 19,790B/1103L/YO65 got back up and shook itself down. It added with timid anger, “It was *you* who went into *me*!”

“Oh, so it’s *my* fault you were standing there, is it?” soul 19,790B/1103L/YO65 tutted.

“Look, this is where I was put . . .”

“Oh, and you always do just what you’re told, do you?”

“So far, yes. But, I haven’t existed for very long yet. Things *could* change!”

Not the most auspicious start to a relationship which would almost certainly last as long as they shuffled towards the loading bay. But, the odd thing was, they were instantly drawn together,

and they chatted argumentatively about what earth might be like, what the less industrial areas of heaven might be like, what their favourite colours, songs and books might be. Of course it was a little early to know. However it did pass the time, which was good because there seemed to be an awful lot of it.

They ignored all the other souls in the line and argued endlessly about everything and nothing:

“Nice cloud,” remarked soul 19,789B/1103L/YO65, amiably.

“What’s so nice about it?” soul 19,790B/1103L/YO65 replied tartly.

“Well, err, it’s got a silver lining.”

“*Every* silver lining has a cloud though!”

“Well, that’s one way of looking at it, I suppose.”

“Soul 19,789B/1103L/YO65,” echoed from an unseen tannoy, “please proceed to Loading Bay twelve.” Soul 19,789B/1103L/YO65 was oblivious to everything, other than the argument.

“Oh, shut up.”

“No! *You* shut up.”

Sidney glared. “Oh come on,” he snapped, “I’ve had a hard day!”

“*Seriously* shut up!”

“Or wha . . .”

“I don’t,” said soul 19,790B/1103L/YO65, over-emphasizing the letter **T**, and sounding out every syllable staccato style, “think I’m getting through to you. *Don’t* say another word!”



Sidney finally lost his temper. "It's *you*! Look! I can see your number from here! **Now come on!**"

Being so abruptly interrupted at this early stage could cause long term repercussions, but that really wasn't Sidney's problem. He'd leave that one for the angels, or whoever dealt with such matters. He glowered savagely. With a sudden and undignified lunge, he grabbed a hold of soul number 19,789B/1103L/YO65, and shot earthward with some impatience, totally ignoring the Divine Air Traffic Control, "*Why* on earth do people want babies?" he almost spat.

Soul 19,790B/1103L/YO65 said something that soul 19,789B/1103L/YO65 couldn't quite make out. One of those evocative remarks that lingers in the air with a question mark hanging over it, and begs to be chased. But, whatever it was, it was left there procrastinating. Teasing and tempting like an irresistibly taboo sin.

But, being constrained by the beak of a bad tempered old bird, soul 19,789B/1103L/YO65 couldn't chase it. More's the pity because it would now haunt the poor soul for a very long time to come. It would always be there, albeit unconsciously.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

It could have been anywhere in the nineteenth or twentieth century, or thereabouts. Nothing really helped you determine quite when it was.

And, it could have been anywhere in the country – but, the country was definitely England . . .

Imagine, if you would, a forgotten village in the last throes of the age of the car-boot sale. A pretty village called Pobblestrum. The houses were capriciously strewn around in every direction. Not one building was the same as the next, there again, they were never designed to match. The builders may have thought in much the same way as ladies getting ready for a party, who phoned each other to make sure they wouldn't wear the same dress as their friends.

The builders spoke to one another and sorted out that Eric couldn't possibly use black window frames because Paul was using black. And besides, it wouldn't possibly have gone with his roof!

The higgledy-piggledy thatched roofs, stained-glass windows and cobbled pathways lay quietly and whimsically in the

Bogcragston valley, inhabited by all sorts of characters: major-generals, and Ladies and Knights of the realm. As well as the high and mighty, there were the lowly, bred to tug their forelock to whoever required this invaluable service.

Pobblestrum lacked nothing in respect of tweeness and eccentricity. It had its ponds and trees, its shops and churches and its 'Duck Crossing' signs.

If you were to take a brisk stroll along any of the tangly roads or alleyways, which few of the sauntering locals ever did, sooner or later you were bound to come across one of the quaint clusters of Pobblestrum shops. One such establishment, the watch shop, was run by a man who had every reason to be gloomy.

"I've only had one person in all day," he'd frequently opine, "and all he wanted was a second hand, second hand."

Obviously whoever 'he' was, he was from out of town, most of the residents weren't bothered about seconds and minutes; they were perfectly content to look at their wrist-calendars, which they did, *if* they remembered, once or twice every now and then.

Just a stone's-throw away was the television shop, bringing more unwanted technology kicking and screaming into a world of coopers, thatchers, cobblers, tinkers and blacksmiths.

This shop, in days gone by, rather a long way by, was a barn. It still had a lot of its original character; uneven floors and walls and old wooden beams across the ceiling. No horses, or even barn dances anymore, and a television stood where a bale of hay once was.

Ivy straggled up the walls, mostly on the outside. There was no mistaking its rustic charm despite the stacks and stacks of precariously balanced bits and bobs with their innards jutting dangerously out. Between these bendy piles of gently swaying bits and pieces, a clearing zigzagged through to the workshop in the back, from which the constant aroma of coffee and electrical burning mingled and drifted.

The workshop itself, which was the epicentre of the whole operation, consisted of two work-benches cluttered with tools of every type, and very often a doojigger of some kind or another, in various states of repair.

Deserted, and imaginatively shaped strings of spiders webs looped and dangled unstably from every nook, just managing to support their dense layers of thick brown dust. And from every cranny, particularly those near the ever-boiling kettle, a curious off-coloured mouldy gunk, presumably encouraged by steam and condensation, made interesting patterns.

The man behind all this paraphernalia was George Smart, and he ran his business like a well oiled machine. Like a well oiled machine that had been dropped from a great height, got quite badly mangled and perhaps should never have been oiled in the first place.

A solemn man, George couldn't truthfully be described as happy-go-lucky with *any* stretch of the imagination. The type of man whose proverbial glass was always half empty, you might say. Whether it was habit or punishment, he was undecided, but he returned to his place of work to feel "Monday morningish," every

morning. But, in order to alleviate the agony, he had extended his lunch break to an hour and a half, to “close my eyes for five minutes.” Not so much a mid-life crisis as a mid-day crisis.

George had just become a father to his first son, not that anyone would have been able to guess. He masked his excitement under a veil of gloom. Meanwhile at home, Soul number 19,790B/1103L/YO65 was desperately trying to familiarize herself with her bodily functions. And for reasons she couldn't quite work out, everyone in this strange new world kept calling her Emily.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

On the other side of the horizon to Pobblestrum, about the same distance again, lay another exquisitely enchanted village. The sort of place you might expect, wrongly, clotted cream to come from.

A milk-white stallion and a dapple-grey mare were the pride and joy of the local bus service, and they loved that leg of the journey: Omnidowns consisted of an intricate web of single track roads, all of which inexplicably went downhill, whichever way you were heading. And, with similar oddness, you never reached the bottom. Whichever of its narrow and weaving lanes you chose, and from whichever direction, you seemed to come across the same land marks time and again. Omnidowns is a totally and utterly unmappable place, even to Google!

In the centre of the village, there's a small wooded area which normally goes completely unnoticed to passers-by. A little way in, there's a slight clearing where the trees get smaller, the toadstools larger and the flowers more colourful. In the height of summer, glorious vermilions and cyans almost shone from the undergrowth, although Alf only knows from which flowers they radiate, if any. That area seems to continue limitlessly, beyond where the horizon

should start, and your eyes begin to go in and out of focus at that disconcerting point.

This perplexing world had a complete otherness to it, even to the locals of this idyllic fairyland. But despite its haunting beauty, this was still an unyielding place to most. Of course, Alf was unfazed by it. There again, you often wondered quite how much he *actually* noticed.

Alf was a short man with a pipe permanently fixed to his mouth, but which was rarely ever alight. The people of Omnidowns believed that their ancestors were apes, but Alf's, according to local folklore, were gnomes.

And, it was within this clearing that Alf lived. A cottage which he had built himself. Not an extraordinary house as you might imagine. But, a place that he could call home.

No one was in at the minute though.

Dutifully, but reluctantly, Alf was beside Anne, his good lady wife, in the maternity unit of the local hospital. Judging by the expressions on their faces, he was having a far harder time of it than her, despite the abnormal amounts of oxygen he was breathing in through his pipe.

Anne comforted him patiently whilst giving birth to soul number 19,789B/1103L/YO65, who was, like so many others at this tender age, tremendously unused to his new body; how his bladder worked, his fingers, legs or any of those niggly little bits. He was, however, given a much easier name to remember: Daniel.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Alf lit his pipe, found his driving gloves and started his car. The Matheson's were off on holiday, and that was all there was to it! And, they *would* enjoy it, they told each other.

Then he started the old banger again, until it developed into that old familiar rattling sound which he'd grown to know and love.

Alf's neighbour had a bright red sports car; a car that attracted attention everywhere he went. People heard him from miles around, and turned to see the spectacle that made *that* noise.

Although he never quite understood the difference, Alf was quietly proud that his own car had a very similar affect.

Anne was petite and neat to the finest detail. With a starched skirt, blouse and face, she sat and fidgeted anxiously in the passenger seat with an upside-down road atlas on her knee. "Now, don't drive *too* fast, Alf, darling," she suggested, "we've got *all* day."

They had indeed got all day. It was nevertheless a *long* day, and a long journey. Far, *far* longer than Alf had originally calculated.



Alf finally drew his car to a grinding halt in the unevenly shingled car park of the hotel. Hungry, tired and fraught, he led his little family to their room. Their home for the following week, whether they liked it or not. And, they *would* like it, Anne and Alf reminded themselves quietly. Alf dropped the suitcases onto the threadbare carpet, they splashed their faces with a little discoloured water, and then headed off to find some food.

The hotel was rather rustic, but they were used that. It was dark, derelict and gaudy, and within their price range.

Alf sat down in the restaurant, moodily puffing on his now unlit pipe, and stared grumpily at the menu, as if he were trying to fire laser beams from his eyes.

Anne strapped Daniel into the high chair with some force, and sat down herself. She glared at Alf with a deafening silence. They hadn't spoken a single, solitary word to each other for the past hour and a half, and they weren't about to start now.

Thanks to the baby boom, the country had been turned into one giant nursery. The restaurant offered no reprieve. Anne tried to pretend she hadn't noticed the baby on the next table along. A rather thin child, but eating like he was possessed. Possessed by a rather larger baby.

On the table opposite sat the Smart family. Already two days into their holiday, and enjoying it *every* bit as much as the Mathesons.

Little Emily was slurping and spilling her lunch all over the floor. Something it would take her many years to conquer. Daniel looked up from his soggy baby food, and the two of them caught sight of each other once more. It had been a year since he'd seen soul 19,790B/1103L/YO65, and, boy, had she changed? Still recognizable though, somehow.

There they sat, high chair bound, staring across the table at one another, spellbound, as if there was nothing, and no one else in the room. They somehow knew they had something to communicate, although they had no conscious idea of what or why. They vainly reached out their tiny, waving arms, but to no avail.

Bodies are like puppets to the souls that inhabit them, worked from the inside. In these cases though, not very expertly. At that tender age, their under-developed bodies weren't strong enough to retain them. And their souls extended further than their physical counterparts, floating ever closer, transfixed and hovering, unseen above the table.

Their thrill was such that they simply couldn't contain themselves.

When their mothers strapped them into their high chairs, they had no idea how inadequately they would hold them. Not only had the babies become free of from the straps, but also from the very confines of their own bodies. Unfortunately they didn't have *complete* independence, and were still attached by some sort of spiritual rubberiness. This was something Daniel discovered to his

peril. Having stretched himself just that *little* bit too far, he suddenly pinged back into his startled little body, with a jolt.

Anne noticed what she interpreted as a tiny spasm, and put it down to indigestion. “Oh, he’s got *such* a delicate tummy.” She feigned a smile in Alf’s direction, but he hadn’t noticed at all.

Before the infants could make a second attempt at this reunion, Emily was hoisted away by his mother. One minute you’re being carted around by a bad tempered stork, and the next, it’s some strange woman. At that age your life’s just not your own.

## CHAPTER FIVE

Emily was now a young woman. And like many young women, she was empathetic and perceptive. She worried about the state of the world and the shape of her nose.

And she was flourishing in the world of light entertainment, and she hated it! She cursed the day she ever joined that damn orchestra.

She had been bought! Mere money had lured her away from the work she loved – the likes of Fauré's Requiem simply didn't pay the bills. She was a whore now, and that's all there was to it. She detested herself.

And, *why* did they have to dress up to the nines? All right, so she used to love dressing up. It only seemed like yesterday when she played in her long Guinevere-style gowns. But, that was different.

Her cello alone was cumbersome enough. But the dress was sheer masochism! And for a *pit* orchestra? Where no one but the conductor would see her? Unlike the shows for which she played, she had sold out!

Although the theatre was brand new, the pit still managed to have that old stale smell. Just like all the others, in every town to which their tour had taken them.

To her right, Jane had caught her eye. One of the violists, Jane was the most dangerous of enemies; one who called herself a friend. The type who liked to call a spade a fork.

Emily pretended she hadn't seen Jane's smile. The sweeter the smile, the more venomous the snipes, she thought to herself. She stared intently at her music instead, which, after playing the same thing for what seemed like an eternity, she certainly didn't need anymore. Bloody Orpheus and *her*. This, without a doubt, *really* was the underworld!

The house lights dimmed and Sir Arthur raised his baton.

Her cigarette during the interval would be the next oasis of normality. A dirty, expensive habit that would at least ensure a few minutes freedom from Jane.

Now a young man, Daniel had had no haunting mysteries crossing his mind for many years. He catered for the requirements of his body now, like they mattered. And, like so many humans, had long since forgotten about the needs of the soul.

He had moved to nearby Bogcragston. He hadn't move there because it was picturesque.

It wasn't.

In fact, Bogcragston was one of the few places that had its appearance enhanced by the introduction of speed cameras. Its occupants weren't so much Ladies and Knights, as ladies *of* the night.

A town visibly in decay. But it did have a new theatre.

Sharon seemed destined to wear name-badges throughout her professional life. Whether it was to assist dissatisfied customers with their complaints, or for her own personal benefit, was anyone's guess.

And she had perfected that smile while working as a doctor's receptionist. An unconvincing smile that appropriately turned the sides of her lips upwards while her eyes remained dulled and blank. Somewhere along the line, social graces and Customer Service had passed her by.

Sharon glanced at Daniel's ticket and ushered him a couple of reluctant paces, waved her torch vaguely towards the front of the theatre, and mumbled, "You're somewhere down there." She creased a strained smile back to her face, "*Do* enjoy the show, Sir."

Coincidentally, the seat which Daniel had been allocated was the one used by Emily between sound checks just an hour earlier. He could smell her perfume still lingering in the air as he sat down.

At the same time as Emily was sitting there, Daniel was still at home getting ready. Running around the his house trying to find his other sock, and looking for a jacket that would hide the creases in his shirt.

The house itself was a model residence for the town. Complete with ceiling mould and indestructible rising damp; sliding doors which wouldn't slide; and sinks that didn't even fulfil their basic function of draining water. When he bought the place, it didn't

come with an instruction book. Although, if he was honest with himself, he wouldn't have read it, *even* if it had.

Nevertheless, he still managed to give the impression of being reasonably clean and well-dressed.

Unbeknownst to Emily and Daniel, they shared very similar tastes. And, what they didn't have in common would have perfectly balanced and complemented each other; Daniel was no more a fan of this type of music than Emily. And being there just seemed like a rude interruption to his life.

This had been a terrible mistake, and he didn't hide his indignation. Why had he agreed to accompany his father?

From their front row seats, they could just about make out movements in the shadowy pit below them.

After all these years, Emily and Daniel finally found themselves in such close proximity again.

The orchestra opened, and so did the curtain.

The performance was exemplary. Except, Emily thought, for the noise emanating from the viola section that purported to be music. *One* viola in particular.

She had to admit though, that whereas her own playing was note-perfect, it was also totally devoid of any emotion. But, given what she was feeling, that probably wasn't a bad thing.

Meanwhile, Daniel tapped the face of his watch as if it would speed up time. And he gazed at a moth intent on injuring itself on a spotlight. He whiled away the first half wondering, *if* moths

liked light so much, why weren't they diurnal? A design flaw, perhaps? Problems in heaven's Planning Department?

Finally, after an inestimable period of hellish theatricals, the curtain came down. Daniel wasted no time in finding the smoking area. By the time he arrived, there was already a quagmire of smokers with the same intention. He inconspicuously sloped around the back of the building, overlooking the disused canal. He stared into the distance at the sun setting behind the silhouetted rooftops of Bogcragston. And, he contemplated why his teeth itched.

Way above the canal bridge, a flock of swallows played on light winds. Like the clouds, the birds radiated deep oranges and reds, and they danced in flame-like movements, swirling across the sky.

The orchestra took a little longer, having to pack their instruments out of harm's before clambering to toilets, the bar, and then back to the toilets again. Emily fumbled in her bag for her cigarettes, glanced disdainfully at Jane, and made her escape with relief.

Like Daniel, Emily opted to avoid the crowds, and made her own way to the back of the theatre too.

All that remained of Daniel's visit was the remainder of his abandoned, and still smouldering cigarette. Emily tutted and stamped it out. One final smoke ring drifted lazily up into the air, and Emily gazed wondrously at the birds flying in the remainder of the sunlight.



The two of them would spend their first evening together; something neither of them would know. A case of being in the right place, but, fatefully, at *slightly* the wrong time.

This is a work of fiction. Any resemblance of characters to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental

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